

Mr. Jepson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for his question and for the points he has made. The workers do have a right to strike. However, the Government has the right and the responsibility to move the mail and to ensure that Canadians receive all services. It only clouds the issue to use as an example a meat-packing plant. That is totally irrelevant to the important issue that most Canadians believe it is their right to have proper and reliable mail service.

For that reason, I think it is important that replacement workers are brought in. They are not scabs. They are individual Canadians like the Hon. Member and I with families and loved ones. They are human beings. For a Member of Parliament or anyone else to refer to another person as a scab is distasteful to most Canadians. They are replacement workers who are willing to accept job conditions when other people are not prepared to accept those conditions.

I am not saying this as a blanket statement. I am talking about what is really an essential service to Canadians. I do not suggest that this is a desirable approach to take in a blanket fashion. But I do say that in a case such as the Post Office when so many people are caught in the wide net of a postal strike, the Government, if it is responsible and doing its job, must ensure mail delivery to all Canadians.

Mr. Langdon: Mr. Speaker, I have two questions to put to the Hon. Member who has just spoken. First, I would like to follow up on the question put by my colleague from Kamloops—Shuswap. I would be very interested in hearing the Hon. Member describe previous cases in the history of this Crown corporation of strike-breakers being used. I think the use of strike-breakers is an extremely provocative action. It was seen to be an extremely provocative action in the case of the letter carriers strike. Despite the fact that it has always been an essential service, is this not the first time that Canada Post has taken this extremely provocative step?

Second, at the beginning of his remarks the Hon. Member referred to the hundreds of responsible union settlements which take place across Canada. I think it is important to keep these settlements in mind. The reason those responsible settlements have taken place at Chrysler, Ford and General Motors is that there is always a possible cost to the employer if a settlement is not reached, just as there is a possible cost to the worker who has to go out on the picket line and lose wages.

In this case, was the possibility of a responsible negotiating process not badly undercut by the obvious willingness of the Government right from the beginning of the dispute to legislate people back to work? Did this not make it next to impossible for the Crown corporation to bargain with any sense that it would lose something? It knew that if a strike took place the Government would step in and send the workers back to work. There was, therefore, no potential loss to make them responsible at the bargaining table.

Postal Services Continuation Act, 1987

• (1220)

Mr. Jepson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Member for his question. I am afraid that he has selective amnesia with regarding the actions of the Government over the past months. The Government appointed Mr. Drouin and Mr. Foisy, who conducted extensive hearings, and finally appointed the noted labour negotiator, Mr. Bill Kelly. The Minister and the Government have made a very conscientious effort to reach a negotiated settlement.

It is clear that CUPW had another agenda. The major issue is not wages or other benefits. The major issue is, who is running the Post Office, CUPW or management. With the greatest of respect, I believe that CUPW ran the Post Office for too many years under the previous administration. It is time that management be allowed to manage.

With regard to the Member's first question about a precedent being set with strike-breakers, I cannot cite specific examples off the top of my head, but I believe, with due respect, that it has happened on isolated occasions before. However, by the same token, I do not believe that we have any choice when we consider the position in which Government and the postal corporation has been placed. The mail must be delivered. If the people who are there are not prepared to do it at \$24.50 an hour plus benefits, we must get someone else to do it. There are 2,000 people in London who said that they would do it.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): I am happy to take part in this debate, if for no other reason than to express my disapproval of the manner in which the Government is handling this matter. None of us relish this debate or like the situation. This is not the first time we have been through this. This is about the tenth or twelfth time we have been through it in the years that I have been here.

On no other occasion when the Government has felt compelled to bring in back-to-work legislation to end a strike or lock-out was the use of strike-breakers or scabs—and that is what they are—encouraged or allowed. On a couple of occasions which I can recall the Government legislated a settlement with which neither side was very happy, but at least it was fair and even-handed. Any legislation slanted in favour of one side is undemocratic and unfair.

I do not dispute that from time to time an occasion will arise when purely as a last resort, after every other effort has been exhausted, legislation will be necessary. On the odd occasion in previous years even the Minister has met with both sides, separately and together, in an effort to reach a settlement under the principles of collective bargaining. That is a long-standing tradition in this country supported by all sides of the House.

Legislation which takes sides invites and incites violence. Otherwise law-abiding, decent citizens of Canada are so frustrated and angered that they believe they have no other